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# Monument and material reuse at the National Memorial Arboretum

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## Abstract

Exploring the relocation and reuse of fragments and whole artefacts, materials and monuments in contemporary commemorative memorials in the United Kingdom (UK), this paper focuses on the National Memorial Arboretum (Alrewas, Staffordshire, hereafter NMA). Within this unique assemblage of memorial gardens, reuse constitutes a distinctive range of material commemoration. Through a detailed investigation of the NMA's gardens, this paper shows how monument and material reuse, while used in very different memorial forms, tends to be reserved to commemorate specific historical subjects and themes. Monument and material reuse is identified as a form of commemorative rehabilitation for displaced memorials and provides powerful and direct mnemonic and emotional connections between past and present in the commemoration through peace memorials, of military disasters and defensive actions, the sufferings of prisoners of war, and atrocities inflicted upon civilian populations. In exploring monument and material reuse to create specific emotive and mnemonic fields and triggers, this paper engages with a hitherto neglected aspect of late 20th- and early 21st-century commemorative culture.

## Keywords

commemoration; death; gardens; memorial; memory; peace

## Introduction

The study of monument and material reuse – the complex cultural biographies of portable and monumental things – has been a growth area of archaeological research and a cornerstone of the study of 'the past in the past' and 'archaeologies of remembrance' (e.g. Borić 2010; Bradley 2002; papers in Bradley and Williams 1998; Holtorf 1996; Holtorf and Williams 2006; Lillios and Tasamis 2010; Mills and Walker 2008; Thäte 2007; Van Dyke and Alcock 2003; papers in Williams 2003). With the development of 'contemporary archaeology' (see Harrison and Schofield 2010), or 'archaeologies of the present' (Harrison 2011), the biographies of artefacts and monuments, and archaeology as a process of memory work involving the reactivation of places and things, have been considered by archaeologists for recent times.

Contemporary archaeologists have explored how memories are invested in, and extracted from, ruins, abandoned sites and landscapes (e.g. Andreassen, Bjerck and Olsen 2010; see Harrison 2011) and curated through materials and portable artefacts through collections and displays (e.g. Filippucci 2010; Holtorf 1996; 2003; 2005; Moshenska 2008; Saunders 2007; Williams 2012; reviewed by Williams 2011). Hence, material traces of past places and times can be mobilized in recent times for a range of purposes, including affording legitimacy, authenticity and nostalgia, and can construct specific mnemonic connections between past and present, providing the basis for emotional and social ties and identities to be negotiated among the living (Sørensen 2010; but see Buchli 2010). However, in the literature published to date, the specific practice of translating, rebuilding and/or incorporating reused fragments

and whole material cultures – including the translations of memorials themselves – within newly constructed memorial gardens has escaped detailed scrutiny.

Across the Western world, a widely recognized development since at least the 1980s, intensifying towards the millennium, has been a proliferation of memorials of many kinds, perhaps even reaching ‘manic’ proportions (Doss 2010). Within this efflorescence of public memorial culture, traditional historical subjects have been reinvigorated and sometimes recast, while a range of ‘forgotten’ and alternative histories have been recognized and rehabilitated (Ashplant, Dawson and Roper 2000; Doss 2010; Moriarty 1999). There have also been many new subjects to commemorate, from the death of Princess Diana to the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers. In the UK, this has a particular manifestation in the many pre-existing war memorials (mainly those commemorating the First and Second World Wars) in the UK’s cities, towns and villages being restored, augmented or serving as foci for new memorial gardens and the public registration of memorials (see Gough 2009, 96–100).

A range of civilian groups and themes have joined the martial themes, from those suffering from particular diseases to the remembrance of those killed on UK roads. This craze of memorialization thus has escaped traditional moorings and is a complex, largely undocumented and widespread aspect of life in early 21st-century UK landscape and society within which private and public memories intersect and are held in tension (see Gough 2009, 96).

The reuse of materials and monuments might superficially appear to be but a minor component of these commemorative strategies and has consequently escaped detailed consideration.<sup>[1]</sup> However, this theme seems particularly prominent at the UK’s largest and newest memorial landscape: the NMA. This national centre for mourning and remembrance commemorates a bewildering array of individuals, events, institutions and communities in the UK’s history with links across the globe (see Gough 2009).

I suggest that the specific attention to monument and material reuse at the NMA is because of its aspired role as a national focal point for the commemoration of themes and subjects across a broad expanse of time and a global geographic scope. Moreover, the NMA was founded and evolved in the retrospective environment of the Millennium phenomenon in the UK (Gough 2009, 96). It might also be because monument and material reuse articulates in tangible terms the metaphorical rehabilitation to memory from death and ruination envisaged through the act of restoring or creating new memorials. Also, I suggest that monument reuse creates special emotive ‘fields’ (Harris and Sørensen 2010), facilitating and enhancing the specificity and intensity of the social memories constituted and their contemplative significance and emotive impact on visitors.

As repositories, but also as triggers, for engagements with the past, we find old things given a new aura of attachment to place and people at the NMA. Key to this argument is that monument reuse is not randomly distributed within the NMA’s memorial gardens: it seems particularly significant for a specific range of memorial subjects. By looking across and between memorials, monument and material reuse can be shown to be a part of a trend in commemorative practice rather than an arbitrary choice in the contemporary and diverse repertoire of commemorative expression.

## **Introducing the NMA**

Before exploring monument and material reuse at the NMA, it is important to introduce this unique site within the UK. The idea for the NMA originated in the late 1980s and became a reality following gifts of over 150 acres of land. The site developed as a series of woods and memorial gardens beside the river Tame, near Alrewas, Staffordshire (in the English Midlands). Explicitly inspired by American commemorative ventures (see Doss 2010), it has been run since 2003 by the Royal British Legion to serve as a focus of national mourning and remembrance (Childs 2008; Gough 2009; NMA 2009; 2012). There is a visitor centre and chapel and one museum (see below). The centrepiece of the NMA is the monumental Armed Forces Memorial opened on 12 October 2007 by Queen Elizabeth II to remember all servicemen and women killed on active service since the end of the Second World War. Spreading out from this focal point is a set of paths along which one encounters a wide diversity of memorial gardens.

Significant in thinking about the NMA as a memorial landscape is that it cannot be seen as a 'war cemetery' or 'war memorial', although conflict commemoration does dominate the site. Moreover, it is a complex amalgamation of public and family/private memorials, often embedded within the same individual gardens. Hence any study of the NMA cannot treat it as a coherent programme of 'conflict commemoration', nor even primarily public remembrance as its focus in a narrow sense.

The NMA's commemorative subjects are varied. The NMA is replete with memorial gardens commemorating conflicts, campaigns, operations, regiments and military installations. These are juxtaposed with memorials to a host of other themes and subjects. There are not only memorials to victims of atrocities and accidents in war and peace, but also peace gardens, memorial gardens dedicated to rotary clubs, emergency services, industries, charities, voluntary and religious organizations and those dying in infancy and childhood (Gough 2009, 104-8). Hence, the NMA embodies many facets of a contemporary memorial 'mania' that has proliferated far beyond conventional martial subjects during recent decades (Doss 2010). Also, because the NMA commemorates such a wide range of conflicts and groups from across the UK's former empire and colonies, many of the memorials are of European and global relevance. The NMA is thus inclusive, with 'national' commemorations intersecting on many registers with those of other allied nations and with transnational ethnic, religious and social groups. Equally, the NMA embraces the UK's regions, localities, communities and families as much as it does national themes (Gough 2009, 109).

Thus, the NMA is a vast cenotaphic landscape memorial to a myriad of themes and subjects, constructed over gravel quarries on an unprecedented scale for the UK. The NMA contains 'memorials' explicitly defined as part of the discourse of the site but on a number of scales. The entire landscape is considered a 'memorial', didactic enterprise. Meanwhile, each garden possesses a memorial theme. Within each garden, there are often numerous memorial plaques fronting specific trees, benches, sculptures and monuments, with varied commemorative significances to individuals and groups that share different roles within the garden's overarching memorial theme. Hence the site contains over a hundred memorial gardens and many thousands of memorial plaques dedicated to many institutions, but also to many individuals and families.

The medium of what constitutes a 'memorial' is explicitly defined within the published literature regarding the NMA. Yet while trees and other plants are advocated as the dominant mode of remembrance, texts within the memorial gardens and landscape are ubiquitous:

everything is labelled. Moreover, the guidebook directs the visitor to the significance of every tree and material (see Gough 2009, 108).

This paper contends that the interplay between text and different categories of material culture are key to how the NMA operates and explicitly defines itself as a place where memory work operates and remembrance ‘grows’. Given its scale and complexity, the NMA has defied and eluded detailed consideration to date (the principal exceptions being papers by Gough 2004; 2009; Williams 2013). Certainly, it is a largely shrine-like and cenotaphic memorial landscape; its power derives from its past neutrality in terms of the prior commemorative significance of the place itself. As a former gravel quarry, it was a sacred void, a clean slate or no-man’s-land. In this sense, the landscape was not a place of commemoration immediately preceding its construction, and indeed this symbolic centrality and neutrality are key to its status as a memorial *axis mundi* for the UK. The NMA is positioned outwith any single community and hence is imagined to speak to and for all.

### **The NMA as surface assemblage**

The NMA’s memorial gardens and woods can be subject to investigation as a commemorative programme from various disciplinary perspectives and numerous scales. Here, I approach it as a surface assemblage of separate memorials (see Harrison 2011); they were designed and planned for different reasons by different groups within a site that connects and binds them together. The NMA’s memorial gardens are thus placed in context, and via their materiality and location they speak to each other and respond to each other in unexpected and unplanned ways. This applies to the sense of dialogue between memorials created as the visitor moves around the site from memorial to memorial. It also applies to the longer term, since the site remains perpetually emergent – cumulative – with new memorials added year-on-year, through the years and seasons since its first construction.

The associative and cumulative dimensions of the site reveal why an archaeological approach to the NMA has its benefits. Like any depositional context involving an assemblage of artefacts or structures revealed by archaeologists, attempting to understand the NMA requires us to move beyond an exploration of individual memorials in isolation to consider their connected themes and associations. Equally, regarding the NMA as a single, collective and coherent planned memorial ‘site’ (i.e., to continue the assemblage analogy, as a single act of ‘ritual deposition’) detracts from the many different, sometimes antithetical, commemorative themes the site contains. Instead, as an assemblage of memorial gardens and memorial plaques, the NMA is far more in commemorative terms than a sum of its parts and the themes and disparities are far more revealing than its entirety. In taking this approach, it becomes possible to reveal a theme in how social memories are choreographed through materiality in early 21<sup>st</sup>-century UK memorial practice. This approach suggests that an ethnographic or oral historical approaches to contemporary sites are not the only, or indeed the principal, methods by which to conduct contemporary archaeology in memorial environments and avoids its ethical complications of dealing with interviews and observations of those using the sites (see also Williams 2011; 2013; cf. Hamilakis 2011; Moshenska 2010). Moreover, in taking this approach, we do not prioritise the designer’s intentions and user’s experiences, and instead explore its material components in terms of both intention and association.

For this study, my field method was unashamedly simple, based on primary first-hand field observation through explorations of the NMA as a visitor. I took a range of digital photographs of the memorials; I did not aim to observe or comment on public gatherings to commemorate the dead. I subsequently compiled instances of possible monument reuse and

cross-referenced them with published information. My focus upon publicly available material is key. This is because the site's guidebook is the principal means by which visitors negotiate the meanings of the memorials. Hence, those instances of matériel and spolia deployment and monument reuse which are explicitly and overtly mobilized within the memorial setting and explained in the guidebook are those active in commemoration within the NMA. Hence I here use the NMA's guidebook as a primary source, in which dimensions of this reuse are communicated to the visitor.

From this primary evidence, I discuss those specific instances where materials and monuments have been translated from afar to be rehabilitated within the NMA. In contrast to the biographies of monuments that remain part of the cultural landscape or situated within museum collections and displays (see Holtorf 1996; 2005), this form of coalescence of reused memorials seems to have escaped detailed scholarly attention by archaeologists, although spoliation has been readily addressed cross culturally in other disciplines (e.g. Brilliant and Kinney 2011).

My key observation is that, by looking at the NMA as an assemblage from an archaeological perspective, it is possible to identify a pattern in those memorials that incorporate old materials and those that do not. Brought from across the globe, monument relocation and reuse seem particularly popular in commemorating tragic mass suffering and mass death within wars and atrocities. Conversely, such direct allusions to past events are rare within regimental and conflict memorials and in memorials to civilian groups at the NMA and elsewhere across Britain. It appears that the UK's memorial designers and commissioners have restricted, yet adapted, the deployment of reused material cultures and monuments to mourn the nation's greatest military defeats and civilian losses. For particular tragic events, relocated monuments and materials can provide both material witness and a touchstone for mourning and remembrance, as well as to allow the commemoration of places or things that leave no trace in their original locales (see also Walls and Williams 2010). The theme of monument and material reuse also demonstrates one perspective by which archaeologists can provide both commentary and critique on contemporary commemorative landscapes and assemblages of monuments and memorial gardens.

This insight has wider implications for understanding why, where and when monuments and materials are reused in commemorative practice in the late 20th and early 21st centuries and, conversely, when they are not. This might provide lessons for thinking about how we interpret monument reuse afresh in the human past. I propose that the pattern identified at the NMA shows the mnemonic and emotive power of monument reuse, but also that it is often too direct, possibly too specific, emotive and controversial, to be appropriate in diffusing commemoration into an aura of timelessness employed for most memorials. In other words, there are contexts where material culture can assert, even demand, specific remembrance through monument reuse, whilst in many others, sublimation to forgetting (Rowlands 1999) is preferred to such specific material translations and re-collections.

### **Reuse in place, plants, stone, soil and stars**

To provide context for the monument reuse identified at the NMA, it is important to briefly sketch the evidence for other kinds of material past constructed in the memorial gardens. There are many kinds of material, arboreal, celestial and geological citation at work within the NMA to construct connections between past, present and future. The arboreal and geological iconography of the NMA explicitly invokes a range of mythical and historical pasts (Gough 2009; Williams 2013). While constructed from a quarried-out void, the

antiquity of the NMA is redolent in the location itself, a landscape 'reclaimed' from gravel and sand extraction quarries leased from Lafarge Aggregates within the National Forest and containing Bronze Age burial mounds (NMA 2012, 102). Moreover, traces of 20th-century warfare can be found in pillboxes lining the banks of the river Tame and now reused as bird hides as integral components of the NMA's wildlife theme.

A range of material agents have been assembled within the NMA's memorial gardens to enhance this commemorative focus. It is possible to regard the plantings of trees as often constituting a form of mnemonic citation, creating and commemorating biographical links to other places and times within the arboreal iconography but also specifically by translating cuttings from other places to grow at the arboretum. Specific biographies of planted trees can be found, for example, in the conkers brought from Drayton Manor, the home of Sir Robert Peel who founded the police force, and used to grow the trees in the chestnut avenue of 'the Beat' (NMA 2012, 75).

In many other memorials, provenance of stone and soil take priority, a strategy that has deep roots in memorials to the First and Second World Wars and the Holocaust (e.g. Young 1993, 50). The Boys' Brigade Memorial, for example, contains stones from each of the four countries comprising the UK (NMA 2009, 53). More specific stone provenances link the memorial to specific historical events: the Phantom Memorial incorporates stone from Senone, near Moussey, France, commemorating the French men and boys of that place who were sent to Dachau and Mauthausen concentration camps in 1944 rather than reveal information about SAS activities (NMA 2012, 78). Likewise, sand was brought from the French Channel beaches to surround the Dunkirk Memorial's plinth and plaque (NMA 2012, 21). Finally, the heavens are employed; with alignments on the Sun and stars used to link the memorials to the passage of time, as with the Armed Forces Memorial, which has an aperture to allow morning sunlight to enter the monument during late autumn mornings, a reflection of the tradition of marking the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month (NMA 2009, 25)

### **Material replications of the past**

Allusions to the historic past in architecture and sculpture – invocations of hyperreality – are also widespread and sit juxtaposed with replicated ancient forms (see Harrison and Schofield 2010, 258). This is seen no better than in the Armed Forces Memorial's larger-than-life bronze statuary of servicemen and mourners juxtaposed with the classical and Egyptian forms of the monument itself. Likewise, the Durham Light Infantry Memorial (an example from a regimental context), the Shot at Dawn Memorial (a 'peace' memorial) and the National Lifeboat Institution Memorial (a civilian charity example) show the widespread composition depiction of hyperreal pasts through statuary and re-created landscapes. Likewise, the juxtaposition of distant and recent past is central within the new (dedicated 12 July 2012) Parachute Regiment and Airborne Forces Memorial. Placed upon a low mound (possibly implying an ancient monument) is a sculpture of Belerophon on Pegasus juxtaposed with a 20th-century parachute soldier gathering his kit after successfully landing.

In other NMA memorial gardens, more distant places are cited through replica materials and monuments. In the context of a military memorial, the Burma Star Memorial adopts the traditional form of an obelisk (itself a widespread memorial replication of antique form) found widely within the NMA (including the Armed Forces Memorial). Yet its precise significance comes from being a smaller-scale replica of the memorial in the Commonwealth

War Cemetery in Kohima: a crucial conflict in the defence of British-held India and Burma from the Japanese Empire (NMA 2009, 74).

A similar material citation to a distant place can be seen in the modestly sized British Nuclear Test Veterans Memorial commemorating all personnel of the Combined Services Task Force who served during nuclear tests between 1952 and 1966. A grotto of Pacific shells has been placed at its base and embedded in the reverse of the memorial. In the context of Staffordshire, its form evokes the geography of the incidents, but more pertinently this is a replica of a shell-decorated memorial situated on Christmas Island, where some British nuclear tests took place (NMA 2009, 88). This is a small yet powerful monument that hardly can be seen to reflect British establishment and government-sanctioned mourning; this is because it is linked to an ongoing campaign for recognition by those who died of conditions likely acquired through intense exposure to nuclear radiation. Hence replicating distant places forms part of memorials that protest and claim restitution within the NMA (see also Black 2004).

A final striking example of the power of replication can be seen in the newly constructed South Atlantic Taskforce Memorial commemorating the 1982 Falklands conflict. The memorial not only incorporates stones brought from the still-contested islands, but also invokes aspects of the design of the war memorial constructed at the military cemetery by the British victors: Blue Beach Cemetery, San Carlos Bay, East Falkland.

These instances have been discussed in greater depth elsewhere (Williams 2013), but these examples suffice to illustrate how, in some memorials at the NMA, citation through replication is a powerful commemorative tool. However, elsewhere this was clearly deemed insufficient. Instead, the choice was made to reuse ‘authentic’ materials and monuments, which I suggest is a related but distinct commemorative strategy worthy of further consideration.

### **Material and monument reuse at the NMA**

Rather than diffusing memory into antiquity or citing specific events and people through the medium of ‘nature’ (stones, plants and stars), the reuse of specific authentic historic material cultures and memorials serves to foreground specific events and the groups connected to them, bringing them into sharp focus through the use of explicit and distinctive material culture and monuments translated from elsewhere to connect the past and present. These serve as a counterpoint to the use of retrieved militaria to commemorate the place itself as a scene of past conflict and its commemoration (see Legendre 2001; Walls and Williams 2010). Through repeated visits to the NMA between 2009 and 2013, I have identified the reuse of material culture and monuments within a range of its memorials. There is a clear preference for monument reuse operating in four discrete memorial contexts:

1. relocated First World War memorials and other military memorials that are simultaneously commemorative of their original subjects and of themselves
2. memorials to military defeats and military defensive actions,
3. war memorials, and
4. peace memorials.

I aim to look at each in turn.

### *Commemorating the rehabilitation of war memorials*



The NMA commemorates through memorials, but also commemorates memorials themselves and the culture of remembrance in which they are situated (see also Williams 2013). The relocation of war memorials within the grounds of the Arboretum simultaneously commemorates subject and object. Within the cloister between the Visitor Centre and the Millennium Chapel are memorials that had lost their home and have been relocated here as a commemorative assemblage from sundry Royal and Sun Alliance insurance offices and other companies that no longer exist including shipping lines (figure 1). Many of these memorials have been moved twice, to wit those relocated to Royal and Sun Alliance's head office and then brought to the Arboretum (NMA 2009, 128). Meanwhile, three more relocated war memorials are displayed in the NMA itself (figure 2). Lloyds TSB also had plans to 'archive' its war memorials at the NMA but their plans were unsuccessful (Gough 2004; see also Gough 1998). These memorials bear their patina and age, and their form and design mark them as 'antique'. They are now situated within a new memorial environment, wall-mounted memorials situated under the cover of the cloister. Meanwhile, there are three memorials located in the open air of the Arboretum grounds.

There are other examples of memorial relocation as a strategy for rehabilitating and perpetuating the commemorative life cycle. The statue and plinth of the Royal Military Police Association was moved from the Chichester barracks where it had been originally unveiled in 1982 (NMA 2012, 84).

For these instances, we find the NMA acting as a conservation area – somewhat like a zoo or a museum or perhaps even an 'ossuary' – a store for memorials that no longer have homes in their original contexts. These memorials simultaneously commemorate the dead, as they always have (the names recorded on their surfaces) and reveal, however, the desire to rehabilitate – bring to life – memorials that have 'died' in their original contexts of construction and display. As an assemblage, they memorialize the Sun Alliance group and other groups, their patriotism, and also the NMA itself as a curator of memory.



**Figure 1** Relocated First World War memorial from the offices of an insurance company, in the cloister adjacent to the Millennium Chapel at the NMA. Photograph: Howard Williams, March 2013.

This theme equally applies to memorials relating to relatively far more recent events and deaths that can no longer remain in their original locations. The Basra Memorial Wall is a striking and very recent example (figure 3). Originally constructed in Basra, Iraq, in 2006, it was rebuilt at the NMA as a ‘personal gesture’ to commemorate British soldiers from the 37th Armoured Engineer Squadron in 2010, incorporating the original bronze memorial plaques (NMA 2012, 86). Likewise, a location at the NMA has been determined for the memorial to British servicemen and women at Camp Bastion, Afghanistan: a cairn of locally sourced stones upon which is mounted a cross made from empty 105 mm shell casings.[2] In these instances, the memorials are given a safe and secure future at a site accessible to mourners, simultaneously distant from, and yet citing, the conflict zone where the deaths occurred. In all these examples, the memorial is materially fixed, and yet conceptually distributed between its original locale and the NMA.



**Figure 2** Relocated First World War memorials within the NMA. Photograph: Howard Williams, August 2012.





**Figure 3** The Basra Memorial Wall. Photograph: Howard Williams, September 2012.

*Commemorating military defeats and defensive actions*

While retrieved weapons incorporated into memorials are the stock-in-trade of contemporary American memorial culture (Doss 2007, 19; see also Doss 2008; 2010), military artefacts are rarely employed in British war memorials (see Walls and Williams 2010)[1]. They are rare also in the NMA, reflecting the inability of these memorials, beyond the confines of regimental bases, to be anything but inappropriately triumphal. Yet there are exceptions that prove the rule. In these cases, militaria are employed to commemorate defensive military occupations or tragic events affecting civilian participants in, and victims of, war. This can be clearly seen in the Dunkirk Memorial (NMA 2009, 40; 2012, 21). Here, a symbolic temporary grave for a British soldier is formed by the Lee–Enfield rifle placed muzzle-down into sand, with a steel helmet balanced upon it. The beach sand from Dunkirk (mentioned above) creates a powerful cenotaph, a temporary grave of an unknown soldier, temporally frozen on the beaches as a landscape microcosm of death and commemoration (figure 4). Again, the memorial is conceptually distributed by its material citations between the past and present, between Dunkirk in 1940 and Alrewas in the present day.



**Figure 4** The 1940 Dunkirk Veterans' Association Memorial. Photograph: Howard Williams, August 2012.





**Figure 5** The Defensively Equipped Merchant Ships Memorial. Photograph: Howard Williams, November 2009.

Other exceptions are two spatially associated monuments commemorating the Merchant Navy. First, the Defensively Equipped Merchant Ships Memorial (NMA 2009, 91; 2012, 130; see figure 5) has a Bofors gun as its centrepiece. This weapon was used to defend civilian crew from attack from sea and air, and commemorates the 2,713 Maritime Royal Artillery gunners killed or missing in the Second World War whilst seeking to protect merchant shipping. This memorial is situated within a distinct alignment of memorials that extends south-east to the newly built South Atlantic Task Force Memorial and north-west to the Master Mariners Sundial commemorating the 2,535 ships and 32,000 seamen of the Merchant Navy lost in the Second World War (NMA 2012, 130). Following this alignment further north-west one enters the Merchant Navy Convey Wood commemorating the 46,000 British merchant seafarers and fishermen lost in the 20th century (NMA 2012, 131). Within the wood is a very low broken column commemorating the deaths of between 6,000 and 9,000 evacuating civilians and military personnel killed when the Cunard liner *Lancastria* was bombed off St Nazaire by German aircraft on 17 June 1940 (NMA 2012, 131). Also within the wood is the second striking example of Merchant Navy monument reuse: the anchor from RFA (Royal Fleet Auxiliary ship) *Sir Percivale* (figure 6). The anchor commemorates the ship's role in the Falklands War in 1982, a conflict that saw the largest loss of Merchant Navy personnel since the two world wars). *Sir Percivale* was used to land troops in San Carlos Bay and was the first ship to enter Port Stanley at the end of the conflict. *Sir Percivale* later saw action in the Gulf War in 1991 and subsequently in the Balkans (NMA 2012, 132). As in other cases, a small plaque explains the significance of the monument, but also depicts the shape of the naval vessel in profile, giving a sense of the complete form that is absent and yet cited by the presence of its anchor. I suggest that the Bofors gun and the anchor are

permissible as militaria because of the specific circumstances of their use and their defensive, auxiliary and/or civilian associations.



**Figure 6** The anchor of RFA Sir Percivale. Photograph: Howard Williams, March 2013.

There is a final, distinct but related use of militaria in the Royal Naval Patrol Service Memorial. This monument commemorates the vessels and crews lost in great numbers working against the hidden enemy of minefields. Here the mine itself, the weapon of the enemy, is deployed as the focus of the memorial (NMA 2012, 129).

In stark contrast, elsewhere in the Arboretum reused militaria are than retrieved, weapons are deployed. This is true for example, of the tank surmounting the Royal Tank Regiment Memorial (NMA 2009, 118; 2012, 130) and the garden seats in the form of 19th-century gun carriages (the regimental motif) within the Royal Artillery Garden (NMA 2009, 63; 2012, 46). Weapons are completely absent upon the bronze sculptures of the Armed Forces



Memorial and in the Parachute Regiment and Airborne Forces Memorial and the Durham Light Infantry Memorial the soldiers' weapons are stowed and slung respectively.

The only exception in represented weapons is one of the four larger than life statues at the centre of the Polish Forces War Memorial (NMA 2012, 91–92), where the male figure representing the Polish Army carries a machine gun in his hands deployed for use. Made in Poland, this memorial can be regarded as standing outwith of the British repertoire of commemoration and reflects the very different experience and social memory of the Second World War by the Polish nation and people.



**Figure 7** The National Ex-Prisoners of War Association Memorial. Photograph: Howard Williams, August 2012.

#### *Prisoner-of-war memorials*

Extending the theme of sacrificial and tragic suffering and loss, prisoners of war are especially memorialized through retrieved material culture at the NMA. Here we find a close parallel with commemoration through physical traces of atrocity deployed evidentially and didactically, as seen in Holocaust memorials including the concentration and death camps of mainland Europe such as Auschwitz-Birkenau. The National Ex-Prisoners of War Association Memorial (figure 7) comprises the actual gates, displayed ajar, of the German prison camp Stalag XIB opened by the 8th King's Royal Irish Hussars on 18 April 1945, thus commemorating the ordeal of forced imprisonment and celebrating the act of liberation (NMA 2009, 96; 2012, 138). The Far East Prisoners of War (FEPOW) Memorial Building, somewhat in contrast, was designed to materialize suffering first and foremost. The design of the building is intended as a monumental version of the huts in which prisoners were housed (NMA 2009, 34; 2012, 53–54).



Indeed, this is the only building on the site that serves as a museum, containing an exhibition that describes the experiences of prisoners of war, including photographs, drawings and numerous artefacts conveying the hardships and misery of life and work within forced-labour camps. For example, within the building, the Java Memorial includes two painted windows, replicas of those made by FEPOWs at Tandjong Priok. The exhibition also has the ability to project the names of the 57,000 FEPOWs onto a wall with a touch-screen facility to search for the burial location of prisoners.



**Figure 8** The Changi Lychgate Memorial. Photograph: Howard Williams, August 2012.

Adjacent to the museum is the lychgate from the cemetery at Changi Jail, Singapore (figure 8), built by prisoners as a memorial to their dead comrades. This memorial, built to invoke the English churchyard boundary and entrance, now commemorates a cemetery that no longer exists (lost in the redevelopment of Singapore), and the sufferings of prisoners of war who lived and died in the prison. The gate was brought back to England in 1971 and placed at the NMA in 2003 (NMA 2009, 70; 2012, 52). Like the First World War memorials rehabilitated with the NMA, it is therefore doubly commemorative of lost lives and of a lost burial ground. Moreover, like the National Ex-Prisoners of War Association Memorial, gates provide a metaphor for spiritual release as well as a tangible mnemonic for places of suffering and death.

The museum and lychgate are joined by two stretches of railway track close by. The Sumatra Railway Memorial is a replica of the railway and the tools used by prisoners of war used as slaves in its construction (NMA 2009, 71; 2012, 55–56). The Burma Railway Memorial (figure 9) contains 30 metres of original rails and sleepers returned from Thailand in 2002. The irony in the iron is made clear: the rails were originally produced in Middlesbrough before being shipped to the Far East (NMA 2009, 72; 2012, 59).



**Figure 9** The Burma Railway Memorial, containing 30 metres of original rails and sleepers returned from Thailand in 2002. Photograph: Howard Williams, August 2012.

In these memorials, the powers of replication and reuse are juxtaposed to the same, rather than contrasting, ends. Rather than to diffuse historicity into a timeless arboreal, geological or antique past, these memorials amplify the connection between past and present through rails and sleepers. Therefore it appears that the FEPOW memorial landscape, as a microcosm with the NMA, strikes a different chord than other elements of the commemorative landscape in the repeated emphasis upon retrieved material culture. One cannot help but draw parallels with the deployment of artefacts as legal witnesses of atrocity, as they are widely employed in Holocaust memorials and museums (Young 1993), since the FEPOW memorials share a desire to mobilize material culture to underpin the historicity of the atrocities they memorialize.





**Figure 10** The Fauld Explosion Memorial, with the Millennium Chapel in the background. Photograph: Howard Williams, November 2009.

### *Peace memorials*

The theme of ruination, the antithesis of building ‘new’ ancient monuments, explicitly challenges the growing remembrance metaphor of the NMA, as in the Imperial War Museum Peace Garden. This comprised a dry-stone wall in front of which are 50,000 pebbles, rocks and bricks, each purporting to represent 10 British and Commonwealth lives lost in the Second World War (NMA 2009, 75). The ruin marked tragic and civilian death in the context of a peace memorial. We find this theme in the other peace memorials at the NMA, as in the World Memorial Cairn containing stones from all over the world memorialising lives lost. Upon visiting the site in 2012 it was noticeable that both these memorials had been removed. Still, another ‘ruin’ remains. In the case of the Fauld Explosion Memorial (figure 10), the stone is a direct geological mnemonic for the underground explosion caused by munitions stored in an abandoned gypsum mine in 1944; the explosion killed 70 civilians in the neighbourhood (NMA 2012, 44).

There are further memorials at the NMA that reflect this theme by integrating spolia into new memorials. The new Hiroshima Stone Memorial (dedicated 12 July 2012 to promote reconciliation) comprises a cairn topped by a stone cube sourced from the bombed city (see Williams 2013).[3]

Likewise, this is evident in the British German Friendship Garden; one of the ‘prehistoric’ monuments of the NMA in the form of a stone circle itself encircled with trees to celebrate 60 years of peace and reconciliation between the UK and Germany (NMA 2012, 85; Williams

2013). The circle's stones are made from rubble taken from an iconic medieval church shattered by the Allied firebombing of Dresden and subsequently retained to become a memorial ruin within the city during the Communist era and a focus for protest against the East German regime. Upon each fragment are the names of different British or German cities subjected to aerial bombardment during the Second World War (figure 11). Situated adjacent to the like-minded Anglo-Japanese Peace Grove, they are both adjacent to the Armed Forces Memorial. Simultaneously, these peace memorials are sheltered by the Armed Forces Memorial from the memorials to the RAF and the FEPOW memorials, with which they might be seen to stand in tension with.



**Figure 11** One stone in the stone circle comprising blocks from the Frauenkirche, Dresden, in the British German Friendship Garden. Photograph: Howard Williams, August 2012.

A comparable fragment is found in a context that sits between military and civilian commemoration. Stimmy's Stone in the Allied Special Forces Memorial Grove is from Strasbourg Cathedral to commemorate the Special Operations Executive and the French resistance to German occupation from 1940 to 1945.

The Twin Towers Memorial —temporarily removed when visited in March 2013 ahead of the redevelopment of the Visitor Centre — includes retrieved rubble from Ground Zero and a fragment of glass from the South Tower (NMA 2012, 22), a small sample of the many tons of material given away to create 9/11 memorials elsewhere (Doss 2010, 159–60).

A very different use of retrieved material culture to commemorate the history of war and peace is the GPO Memorial Garden. In this rare use to commemorate a civilian organization's history, postboxes of different ages from the Victorian period to the present day serve as memorial foci upon which plaques and memorial pebbles have been placed (figure 12). Because this memorial commemorates GPO deaths in two world wars and in the troubles of Northern Ireland, this yet again underpins the use of retrieved material culture to commemorate victims of war and terrorist attack. In the example discussed above of the Dunkirk Memorial, large-scale military losses are conflated in popular memory with the civilian efforts to rescue soldiers from the beaches, making the deployment of militaria here both patriotic and embracing of both military and civilian losses.

### Discussion

The NMA is more than a war memorial and far removed from being a cemetery; it is a complex assemblage of memorial gardens narrated through text panels and guidebooks. Replicated as well as relocated and reused memorials, architectural fragments, stone, soil and artefacts are the medium of commemoration as much as trees, shrubs and flowers. Monument and material reuse is part of a wider strategy of making the NMA an axis mundi by drawing in materials and monuments from all over the world to commemorate Britain's family, community, local, regional, national, imperial and colonial pasts.

Figure 12 The GPO Memorial Garden, including a memorial to a postman killed by the IRA. Photograph: Howard Williams, August 2012.

Sometimes – as with the juxtaposed Burma and Sumatra Railway Memorials – it seems that replica and reused materials can both be mobilized to similar commemorative ends: foregrounding, through emotive triggers of experience, the authentic, historical and legitimate connection between past and present, and between the NMA and the place(s) and people commemorated. Yet I have identified four specific commemorative themes in which reuse of whole monuments, matériel and spolia is prioritized at the NMA and where it was deemed important by commissioners and designers to emphasize the historical veracity of tragic suffering and loss of life through monument and material reuse. I identified reuse as a powerful strategy inherent in the translation and redisplay of war memorials themselves, restoring and curating the commemoration of their subjects, and commemorating the act of commemoration itself. Furthermore, memorials to military defeats and defensive actions are deemed suitable environments for reuse. Memorials to prisoners of war are the one specific category of commemoration where powerful emotions are most widely triggered through artefacts, materials and architectures retrieved from across the world. Finally, peace memorials mobilize ruins into memorials at the NMA to emphasize the futility and destructive effect of conflict but also to imply commemorative restoration and rehabilitation.

In these specific instances, monument reuse offers direct 'time travel' (see Holtorf 2009), prompting different experiential empathies through an emotive and mnemonic touchstone between past and present. These include 'celebrated' and hallowed patriotic defeats (e.g. Singapore and Dunkirk), to valiant military defensive actions (such as the defense of



Merchant Navy shipping), to prisoners of war (e.g. the Burma Railway Memorial) and to civilian victims of warfare and atrocities (e.g. the British German Friendship Garden and the Twin Towers Memorial). The First World War memorials and other relocated memorials might be seen as a different phenomenon. Yet they are tragic monuments as well; indeed they are doubly tragic in mourning a generation lost in the oblivion of the mass death of the First and Second World Wars as well as being monuments ‘rescued’ from oblivion themselves when the companies and places where they had been erected ceased to exist (see Gough 2004). In other words, all these categories commemorate suffering and loss of life but celebrate mnemonic rehabilitation following imperilled dislocation.



**Figure 12** The GPO Memorial Garden, including a memorial to a postman killed by the IRA. Photograph: Howard Williams, August 2012.

This reuse sits at the intersection of many influences and traditions in British and international commemorative culture. There is first the long tradition in designed landscapes of collecting botanical, geological and ethnographic specimens for redisplay within which archaeological spolia are an integral element. In the context of conflict commemoration, it

finds origins in the bringing back of trophies and the curation of portable memorabilia and captured munitions during both 19th- and 20th -century conflicts (e.g. Cornish 2004) as well as the replication of ancient monuments and medieval crosses in newly constructed memorials (Saunders 2003). Moreover, translation and are integral to memorial culture itself in the UK; there is also a long tradition within which war memorials have been translated and shifted within private buildings and public spaces throughout the 20th century. More importantly still, we are used to the dislocation and redisplay of gravestones and the graves they memorialize; a common feature of churches, churchyards and cemeteries since the 19th century. Indeed, archaeological monuments, brought from abroad or retrieved via excavation or chance discovery, sit within this broad range of memorial strategies. Therefore the UK alone has a sophisticated and complex tradition of circulating and relocating memorials and staging their rehabilitation. The NMA therefore builds on a culture in which memorials are always ‘on the move’, their significance shifting with their movement and recontextualizing over time. The NMA reflects this, but also enhances it through its specific aspirations to be a national site of mourning and restorative remembrance. As with the ‘memorial mania’ that Doss (2010) identifies as prevalent in US popular culture, we can recognize a key element of ‘memorial mobility mania’ in UK commemorative practice.

As suggested earlier, the specific emphasis upon antiquity and specific replications and reuses of the past might be linked to the aspirations and programme of the NMA to become a national focus of remembrance. By commemorating Britain’s role in global history, including its colonial and imperial past and the shared pasts of the British Commonwealth and allies, the NMA is distinct in its varied material citations of the past. This distinctive character, as untypical memorial landscape, makes the NMA key to explorations of the materiality of memorials in constructing social memories in contemporary Britain and other parts of the Western world.

Conversely, the majority of other memorial subjects found within the NMA do not overtly deploy reused materials and monuments. The results of this brief survey show that monument reuse is eschewed for the military dead, for regiments or for civilian groups, for whom replicated distant pasts were instead often employed to sublimate deaths into an aura of timeless sacrifice – a social forgetting (Rowlands 1999). This might reveal an ambivalent response to the potential triumphalism inherent in reused militaria, and the potential that relics and trophies might be seen as celebrating conflict or creating too specific, unheroic and horrific connections between past and present. Therefore decisions to reuse, and decisions not to reuse, provide important counterpoints in considering how memorials operate within the NMA.

While found in a wide range of designs of memorial gardens, those involving monument reuse share an association with military defeat, incarceration and/or civilian death. What is significant in this regard is that this pattern of monument reuse is the result not of a single commissioning body or architecture, but of many different decisions regarding how to commemorate specific events or groups within the NMA. Hence they have wider significance in revealing a trend in expectations and aspirations for contemporary commemoration involving the reuse, rather than simply the invocation or replication, of the material past. While these all create senses of the past, they are clearly regarded as related, yet distinct, commemorative strategies. Furthermore, although the NMA as a whole might reflect a broad trend towards the experience of heritage (see Harrison and Schofield 2010; Holtorf 2010), clearly invented senses of ‘pastness’ are sometimes not enough and the experience of heritage demands authenticity to attest to the veracity of human experience in the past.

Within the NMA, we find monument reuse taking on a specific role that seems to owe much to the tradition of utilizing material culture as mnemonic touchstone and as witness to the past in Holocaust museums.

What implications are there for archaeological interpretations of monument reuse in the human past? Here, we have seen how monument reuse is a component of a wider set of strategies for sublimating and connecting past and present in conflict commemoration in which their original significance is integral to their reuse; the past is grounded spatially and temporally (see also Filippucci 2010). All too often, archaeologists see monument reuse as an element of monuments' biographies as a stark dislocation, a rejection or appropriation of past significances within a new commemorative environment (e.g. Williams 1997). Perhaps it is time to soften our view of monument reuse and recognize the mnemonic connections components across these apparent disjunctures and relocations of monuments and their components, and within the implications of absence and loss materialized through ruins and fragments. Rather than defined spaces and materials, monument reuse might be regarded as setting up and valorizing the tangible biographies of things, fostering imaginings and relations between past and present negotiated by participants of rituals within the NMA's memorial gardens and through personal, emotive, engagements with the monuments. Indeed, it is the emotive connections between past and present created through monument reuse that stand out, not only in exploring individual memorials and memorial gardens, but in looking at the broad themes identified. The emotive 'fields' (Harris and Sørensen 2010) created by very different architectural and memorial spaces through the tangible presence of relocated remains can be seen as a theme linking otherwise very disparate commemorative forms and subjects. Engaging with the strands of practice and meaning that might entangle memorials and their subsequent uses explains the powerful mnemonic and emotive efficacy of this strategy when and where it is deployed.

A further implication regards the contribution of archaeology to the interdisciplinary study of memory in contemporary society. Rather than seeing archaeological interventions only in terms of archaeological practice – Moshenska's (2010, 43) 'archaeological memory arenas', or an archaeological ethnography of engaging with visitors (Hamilakis 2011) – we can identify ways in which our foregrounding of materiality and our consideration of relationalities between memorials is a strength of an archaeological perspective.

Another implication is how we consider large assemblages of memorials in arboretums, parks and gardens, as well as in cemeteries. What is also apparent for such environments is that these mnemonic themes need not share a similar form, ornamentation or, indeed, emotive disposition. Instead, they emerge by looking at memorials relationally, looking across memorial designs and considering them neither as isolated nor in purely quantitative terms. In this way, we can discern these trends and themes that cross-cut form by regarding memorials as relationally constituted assemblages; they emerge through an archaeological gaze that considers them as networked components of landscapes of memory, simultaneously drawing upon the power of the past and projecting remembrance into the future.



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## Notes

1 The Imperial War Museum’s inventory of war memorials reveals only 308 memorials that comprise trophies or relics from across the UK out of around 64,000 memorials (0.05 per cent). See [www.ukniwm.org.uk](http://www.ukniwm.org.uk).

2 The Camp Bastion memorial is reported to be being moved to the UK in the Birmingham Post; see [www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/local-news/camp-bastionmemorial-afghanistan-set-3569461](http://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/local-news/camp-bastionmemorial-afghanistan-set-3569461). At time of writing (November 2013) a temporary stake has been placed, marking the spot where it will be rebuilt at the NMA.

3 See [www.thenma.org.uk/events/events-calendar/calendar-of-events/hiroshimastonememorial](http://www.thenma.org.uk/events/events-calendar/calendar-of-events/hiroshimastonememorial).

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